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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ISAIAS FOCUSES ON DOMESTIC ISSUES AND BORDER IN
INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH

¶1. SUMMARY: On May 24, the 16th anniversary of Eritrea's independence, President Isaias Afwerki spoke at length about domestic economic concerns and the border. The President's speech squarely blamed the U.S. for the lack of progress in demarcating the border and described international initiatives to resolve the stalemate as attempts by the international community to "reduce Eritrea into a subservient appendage" (presumably to Ethiopia). On domestic issues, President Isaias catalogued the efforts made by the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) to achieve food security and increase economic development and self-sufficiency, but acknowledged the areas of shortfall. Justifying the GSE's shunning of humanitarian aid as necessary to save the country from a "bondage of mendicancy", he exhorted the Eritrean people to remain patient, toil harder and be prepared to make sacrifices. The President's speech was followed by a short skit presenting the "inevitable downfall of a superpower" - clearly targeting the U.S. U.S. Embassy personnel did not attend any Independence Day events. Full text of Isaias' speech is provided in Para 3. End Summary.

¶2. Comment: Given the President's predominant focus in previous public interviews on Eritrea's foreign affairs initiatives, his emphasis on domestic issues in this speech came as a bit of a surprise -- which may indicate an awareness of the increasing discontent among the citizens of Eritrea with their domestic lot. President Isaias' speech aims at diffusing criticism of his regime's policies while uniting Eritreans by calling on their sense of nationalism, and of course blaming the international community. Unsurprising were his anti-American comments which are consistent with his speeches and interviews over the last year, although post anticipated more hammering of the U.S. and international community on issues concerning Somalia and Sudan. End Comment.

¶3. A GSE English translation of the speech delivered in Tigrinya follows below. Begin text:

Dear Compatriots,
Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the last 16 years, we have been striving, with unrelenting resolve and without faltering in our steps, to ensure steady economic growth in order to raise and ameliorate the living standards and lifestyle of our people. Not to do so would have rendered our independence, for which we yearned for more than two generations and paid heavy sacrifices in the political and armed struggles that we waged, symbolic indeed. It was not easy to initially lay, from scratch, the foundations of a devastated economy. To resurrect those foundations after the new cycle of destruction wrought by Ethiopia 's recent invasion,

exacerbated by incessant hostilities, further amplified the hurdles that we had to overcome. This is too obvious to merit elaboration. Yet, because we toiled, tirelessly, indomitably, and unperturbedly, our accomplishments thus far are beyond comparison indeed. We had no qualms to recognize humanitarian assistance as a transient imperative, indeed even as our right, during austere times until we find relief and recoup the opportunities denied to us for generations. It was this realization that prompted us to solicit humanitarian aid in the first place. However, this was misconstrued as a weakness to foster an attitude of: "Let us bind the hands with which you work and eat, and, let us spoon-feed you" with all its attendant pressures. Thus, when practical and effective alternatives were shunned, we opted for economic liberation and subsequently augmented our own efforts for economic development and growth, to deliver ourselves from the bondage of mendicancy. As a result, we stand on a more sound footing today. This is why we have been working vigorously to ensure "Food Security"; which we saw as primarily a transitional objective from the outset. Indeed, food security, per se, is not the ultimate goal, but an objective for a specific phase aimed at enabling us to produce sustainable surplus in crop output. The productivity of land must be increased; irrigation farming must be developed and propagated instead of mere reliance on rainfall. Instead of limiting and debilitating agricultural land in plots and slopes, it must be leveled and flattened extensively. The wide Eastern and Western plains must be redeemed from traditional pasturage and desolation, and, be cultivated extensively with irrigated water. High-yield seeds must be selected and multiplied. Traditional agriculture must be substituted, in a phased process, by modern and efficient plowing, sowing and harvesting machinery, complemented by advanced and effective drip and spray technology. Pesticides and fertilizers must be extensively, but scrupulously, employed hand in hand with modern projects that enhance livestock

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production. Activities that destroy the environment must be inhibited. Modern agro-industrial plants must be established and expanded. Research and training capabilities must be strengthened. Instead of being content with a single harvest a year, we should strive, whenever possible, to obtain two or three harvests a year. The cumulative objective is to ensure that our programmes of food security attain surplus production and yield competitive exports. All the aforementioned feasible and attainable programs require the implementation of extensive and vigorous soil and water conservation programs; construction of dams, micro dams, diversion canals and wells; provision of machinery and essential equipment in the adequate quantity and appropriate quality; as well as prudent planning, efficient organization and implementation in tandem with financial resources and tireless work. How long will it take to implement, stage by stage, all the objectives listed above and to secure fulfillment of our needs? Inarguably, this cannot be achieved overnight. Nevertheless, to shorten the time, redoubled efforts and sacrifice will always be necessary. Our achievement in the past years was anchored on these premises. Still we have to ask how much of what we planned did we really accomplish? Setting aside accurate measurement standards, we cannot claim to have accomplished even 25% of our plans even by rough, optimistic, estimates. Nevertheless, because we stretched our resources and broadened our efforts, there was no lost time. And although the various programmes we have implemented so far have not ensured 100% food security, it has nonetheless reached an irreversible stage, and can thus be dubbed successful. The experiences gleaned and the efficiency honed along the way, have moreover prompted us to focus on refinement and consolidation of previous programmes, instead of launching many new programmes for the year 2006-2007. To achieve the desired result and taking into account the anticipated rains, our efforts must continue without letup. Moreover, as our capabilities accumulate in these processes, the prospects for higher output in 2007-2008 are more brighter. In our aims to achieve food security, the exploitation of our fisheries has been pursued with the same profound focus and expectation as agriculture. However, despite our high hopes and expectations, we have not been able to exploit even 10% of the potential output. The opportunities that we created to encourage foreign investment in the sector have not borne fruit. Instead, they

inhibited local growth and entailed abuse and pillage. In the circumstances, there is no better alternative to earnest endeavors aimed at developing our own fishing capacity in a highly organized manner, hand in hand with the establishment of proper infrastructure and sustenance of processing and transport facilities. At the same time, we continue to recognize the importance of finding sincere investors and partners, in meaningful ventures and market outlets, and are not sparing efforts towards that end. In this regard, we have not also underrated the substantial challenges posed by the limitations of our human resources and management competencies. The preparations to make the year 2008 a turning point will indeed significantly augment the contributions of the fisheries sector to the overall objective of food security.

We have embarked on impressive projects, throughout the past years, in infrastructure fully realizing that infrastructure - that is roads, air-ports, sea ports, electricity and water supply, communications, terrestrial, maritime, and aerial transport, network of free zones, etc. - is a prerequisite for attracting all kinds of investment. The prospect to launch much bigger projects both by leveraging domestic resources and through joint venture arrangements are better than ever today. Thus, from this year onward, we shall embark on even greater projects.

The incremental provision of residential housing to our citizens at a fair price and with equitable distribution is one of the infrastructural projects we have pursued with paramount interest. But although much has been built, it still falls far short than current and projected demand. Persistent efforts will thus be made to expedite the process in order to harmonize supply and demand in quantitative, qualitative and price terms.

Tourism is one of the promising sectors that will fuel economic growth. The comparative advantages and opportunities that ensue from our natural endowments in general and our sea coast in particular is inarguable indeed. Nonetheless, the obvious lack of infrastructure and proper services had limited any significant investment in the sector in the past years. At this time however, the cumulative infrastructural investments put in place coupled with the promising and tangible opportunities that are already in the horizon will enable us to launch and set in motion really big projects. Still, our expectations must not be exaggerated and we need to recognize

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that we shall have to work with much added vigour to accomplish the initial requirements.

In industry, various enterprises in the agro-industrial and fish-processing sub-sectors that are primarily geared to meet domestic demand and in which we have competitive advantages are in their final stages of completion. The aim is not only to boost production, but to ensure product quality and export potential as well. If the schemes underway to increase cotton production make good progress, they will stimulate growth in the textile and clothes manufacturing enterprises. The same applies to tanneries. Big investments are also underway to bolster production of building materials, (such as granite, marble and others), for the domestic market as well as for export.

With regard to markets, it is obvious that there are legitimate concerns regarding the hike of prices. The impact and ramification of unstable and rapidly rising global oil prices has of course to be taken into account. The arbitrary hike in the price of commodities and consumer products attributed to capricious and illegal practices and that cannot be justified in terms of regional and international market levels will however require better regulation. In this regard, various assessments that have been underway to ensure the realignment of prices will be guided towards practical measures in order to ensure fairness.

In the mining sector, it is well-known that a lot of exciting information has been disseminated and is already in the public domain. True, it has been proven that our mineral resources are large. Yet, exploiting this endowment and perpetuating its benefits for future generations requires judicious agreements with prospective partners and the consolidation of our national capabilities. Suffice it to say that we are unhurriedly and earnestly striving towards that direction lest the boon of minerals becomes a bane and a factor of disillusion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Economic development is not confined to economic sectors only. There are other areas, just as important, which have shown considerable

growth and a marked significance in determining economic growth and the alleviation of living standards. These are: the augmentation of health and educational services in terms of their quality and equitable spatial distribution; expanding social security programs that rectify imbalances of opportunity and the fair distribution of national resources; ensuring that governance and management are efficient and effective; strengthening media outreach to increase knowledge and awareness by disseminating timely and reliable information; expanding cultural activities and fine arts profoundly and extensively so as to invigorate spiritual values. Bolstering our security and defense capabilities - at times by according it a much higher priority - is another task for which we have exerted unflagging efforts. This is not only to safeguard our sovereignty but also to protect the progress of our development drives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All the issues I have mentioned so far are not novel. They are summaries and reminders invoked on this special annual occasion so as to focus our attention. What have been accomplished are indeed tremendous relative to the short-span of time and paucity of opportunities; temporary shortage of resources; and, incessant external hostilities. But we have never been complacent at any given time. Even now, the prospects of a better future are not going to delude us. Definitely and inarguably, nothing will block our determined efforts to ensure, ultimately, irreversible and sustainable development through harder work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Memories are still fresh in our minds of the destruction and retrogression wreaked by the invasion which intended to strangle our development and progress. Our progress in defiance of the regressive forces has not only unsettled our foes, but increased their panic.

It would be an understatement to say that these unwarranted hostilities are today bordering on madness. Although it is possible to enumerate many sinister plots, it is the boundary issue that continues to be brandished as the principal instrument to keep us entangled under constant threat and uncertainty and thereby impede our development and stability.

Indeed, five years have elapsed since the ruling of the Boundary Commission. During those five years, over and above the desire to hold us hostage to uncertainty, no rock was left unturned in pursuit of the futile hopes to overthrow the Government, create chaos and turmoil, sanction the border invasion and reduce Eritrea into a subservient appendage. One plot is foiled... Another plot is concocted, and, foiled; ...without let up. The egregious objective is transparent. The tactic employed constitutes of "buying time through continuous deception". In the wishful thinking that the hope

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might be realized one day! But until when will this continue?

We recall last year's ploy and its outcome. This year's defunct scheme within the "constant tactic" revolves around the last Resolution of the Security Council.

But before we delve into the contents and analysis of the Resolution, it is helpful to know, for better understanding, how and by whom the Resolution was crafted in the first place.

The Resolution was drafted and proposed by officials of the US administration. Unsurprisingly, when the draft was tabled, the other members of the Security Council did not raise any issue with the exception of one Member State. When this Member State suggested amendments to imbue it with some balance, the US representative insisted that the draft was unalterable. The Resolution was thus adopted as is in the name of the UN Security Council.

One of the standard ploys that we find repeated in the Resolution is the attempt to deflect attention from the cardinal border issue and dilute it by focusing on "the Temporary Security Zone, and withdrawal from it." Temporary means temporary. At one occasion, the Special Representative of the Secretary General had disclosed that the peacekeeping force, deployed then for a year and a half, would extend its stay to five years. One may ask, "Who authorized or prodded him to make such a statement? And is there a specific time-frame for the term "Temporary"? That temporary meant until the completion of border demarcation is of course apparent to everyone. US administration officials who have rejected the "final and binding" Award to flout the rule of law; and who have overtly and repeatedly impeded the process from proceeding to physical demarcation after consummating all the necessary technical processes, have rendered obsolete, more than any other party, the

Temporary Security Zone in real terms. In the circumstances, no party should expect the Government of Eritrea to watch idly, paralyzed by willfully created uncertainty, while a quarter of its sovereign territory is doomed to dereliction deprived from any development work. To undertake development programmes with the requisite security arrangements is the sovereign and legal right of the Government and people of Eritrea. This does not require the permission of any party. And, the Eritrean Defense Forces have the obligation and right to conduct development programs and ensure protection in this part of the country just as they do in other parts of our sovereign territory. To insinuate that the TPLF regime, which has been allowed to violate the Peace Agreement, obstruct demarcation, and occupy sovereign Eritrean territory, has equal rights in the TSZ as the people and Government of Eritrea, and to peddle perfidious accusations against Eritrea, is an illegal and perverse scheme that erodes the stature of the UN Security Council and that cannot deceive anyone.

The Resolution contains a seemingly novel and significant article acknowledging Ethiopia 's "acceptance" of the Award. This subterfuge is deliberately inserted to sow confusion and give undue credit to the TPLF regime. The fact is the TPLF regime was instructed by US Administration officials to announce obliquely its "acceptance" of the Award just prior to the passing of the Resolution. The advice went: "the announcement will give us the necessary latitude to ram through the Resolution at the UNSC.... Later until November 2007 and beyond, you can revert to your usual game of buying time and scuttling the process through equivocation".

The Article which contains the clause: "pledges support to the Peacekeeping Force" is hollow by the same analogy as the Article referring to the "integrity of the TSZ". US Administration officials have rendered meaningless the Zone and its temporary essence. Issues that crop up in regard to the Peacekeeping Force are consequences of this grave transgression. Leaving the fundamental question aside, the Government of Eritrea's decision to show restraint and refrain from taking appropriate measures when it knows full well that the underlying parameters of the TSZ have been violated, and, UNMEE's deployment rendered meaningless and is being utilized as a cover for other purposes, must be appreciated indeed.

The Resolution further heralds the appointment of a "Special Envoy to normalize the relations between the two countries." This too is another worn-out scheme. How can normalization or regional peace possibly prevail when Agreements are violated, the Award and the rule of law breached and sovereign Eritrean territories occupied? No one can be deceived by this illegal notion, which can serve no purpose other than to obscure the cardinal issue and to buy time. The Resolution urges that "the Boundary Commission be enabled to fulfill its mandate." But how can the Boundary Commission be expected to fulfill its mandate, when US Administration officials have for the past five years been concocting incessant obstacles and "alternative mechanisms" to prevent the EEBC from conducting its business, and when, even at this late hour, they have coerced and

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cajoled the UNSC to adopt a deceptive Resolution that has nothing to do with legality and that is aimed at corroding the cardinal issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After 5 years of deliberate violations of Agreements, arbitration decisions and the rule of law, the Government and people of Eritrea cannot be expected to seriously consider an illegal Resolution that was primarily concocted to spawn more complications. The EEBC must be allowed to demarcate on the ground its Delimitation Decision without illegal meddling, obstructions or meanderings. The Security Council must also be allowed to shoulder its obligations on the basis of Chapter Seven of the UN Charter and the provisions of the Peace Agreement. It must otherwise be underlined that primary responsibility for the obstructions and deleterious consequences of the past five years, and for new obstacles and negative consequences that may unfold in the period ahead, does not rest on the Security Council but on US Administration officials.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I had originally intended to talk about regional issues; especially the dangerous interventions and complications we see in the Sudan and Somalia. However, as these matters have been broached in numerous recent statements and for the sake of brevity, I shall only ask you to recall the remarks I made at this time last year in

regard to the nature and status of international affairs in the post Cold War era.

Dear Compatriots at Home and Abroad,

We have scaled formidable challenges, obstructions and complications to reach a stage with much higher prospects and possibilities.

Still, the challenges that will confront us should not be underrated. We must thus work with higher vigour and steadfastness.

I wish to thank and extend my congratulations to all my compatriots at home and abroad and to all branches of the Government and the PFDJ. Special thanks are, above all, due to our Defense Forces who are making unparalleled contributions to the security and economic growth of our country by paying heavy sacrifices and enduring lost opportunities.

In conclusion, I wish to thank all the artists and the youth who have toiled hard to make the celebrations of the 16th anniversary of our independence, like other sacred occasions, vibrant and an occasion for buttressing public awareness and steadfastness.

My best wishes for a happy year and good rains

Glory to our Martyrs who made our existence possible

Victory to the Masses!

End text.

MCINTYRE